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SYDNEY MINES

NORTH SYDNEY

FLORENCE

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THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON COAL 1959

MR. JUSTICE IVAN RAND - COMMISSIONER

This brief is being presented to you today on behalf of the citizens of the Town of Sydney Mines, North Sydney, Florence, Little Bras d'Or and surrounding areas. These are a group of Northside Communities who are for the most part dependent on the coal industry. The centre of coal mining activities is in the Town of Sydney Mines and Florence. Old Sydney Collieries Ltd, a subsidiary of Dosco, are the major operators. They have two mines Princess and Florence; they also operate a modern coal washing plant. The other operator is the Indian Cove Coal Co. which operates two small mines. The total work force of all these operations is approximately 1700.

These communities have an approximate population of 23,000 persons. Sydney Mines, Florence and district are practically 100% dependent on the coal industry. The Town of North Sydney has many of its citizens working at the coal mines at both Sydney Mines and Florence. In addition, shipping pier facilities are located in the Town of North Sydney. The Town of Sydney Mines has seven churches, six schools. Two new schools are presently under construction at an estimated cost of \$600,000. Twenty four hundred children are presently enrolled in the schools of the Town of Sydney Mines; Florence, Little Bras d'Or and district have twenty three hundred pupils; The Town of North Sydney twenty three hundred. It must be pointed out here the Town of North Sydney, while having a good number of their citizens employed in the coal industry, is not as dependent on the industry as would be Sydney Mines, Florence, Little Bras d'Or and district.

It has been quite difficult for our communities to plan for the expansion of badly needed civic services and we have lagged far behind other communities in the Dominion of Canada because of our total dependence on the coal industry, which has had lengthy periods of depression over the last thirty years. However, during the war years and post war years, our mines have been operating fairly steady. This has enabled our communities to provide for modest civic improvements such as street paving, new schools, sewer and water extension programs.

However, it must be re-emphasized that we still lag far behind other communities in the rest of our country. By way of example, and as the direct result of adverse economic conditions in the coal areas through the years, the Town of Sydney Mines in 1945 had only been able to provide thirty five percent of its citizens with sewerage facilities. We state emphatically that the coal mining communities have been relegated in our national life to the role of second or even third class by circumstances over which we had little or no control. Present economic conditions existing in our area at the moment are not good. In Sydney Mines, Florence, Little Bras d'Or and district there are approximately 700 unemployed persons. Request for Social Assistance is increasing. It was only in the year 1950 that the Town of Sydney Mines had paid off its Poor Relief Debt on money borrowed for this purpose to alleviate unemployment conditions existing in the coal areas during the 1930's. Continuation of civic improvement programs are therefore entirely dependent on the maintenance of steady work in the coal industry. We feel that every effort should be made to prevent any closures or cut backs in production, in order that our people might provide for their families and that civic services be provided at least on par with other communities in our Province.

We fully realize that you have a difficult task to perform. However we must point out that we, as citizens of coal communities, demand that our people share in the prosperity and development of the Dominion of Canada. If this means that additional assistance be provided the coal industry to keep our mines working steady, then in our opinion this must be done. We wish to state that on the question of aid to the coal industry by the Federal Government wrong impressions are being created. It is the feeling in some quarters that coal is receiving special assistance not applicable to other industries. We state that this is not true. There are many instances in Canada where assistance is provided various industries in the national interest. The coal industry is a natural heritage and it must be developed to the advantage of the people of this country.

Closing coal mines is not new to this area. Many mines have been closed down through the years. Today the economy of this area is based on the operations of two mines of Old Sydney Collieries and two small operations of Indian Cove Coal Co. It is therefore unthinkable to imagine the closure of any one of our mines. If this, by any chance, should happen it would create chaotic conditions. Recent happenings at Springhill, N.S. should make us all realize the seriousness of any further closure. Coal communities of Nova Scotia are as normal in every respect as in any other community in this country not dependent on coal. When one makes a study of families in any coal community it can readily be seen that the same families have worked the coal mines of Nova Scotia with very little change in the personnel of our work force. Therefore it should be pointed out that our people are really attached to their communities and have no desire and indeed would resent any suggestion to move elsewhere in order to maintain their families. The average age of men working in the coal fields is approximately 45 years of age. The Federal Dept. of Labour have been making every effort possible to induce industry in Canada to employ persons over forty five years of age with very little success. Therefore, if there should be any further closure a good portion of our work force would never be able to find employment. We do not feel Sir that we should take up the time of this Commission with too many general statements relating to the coal industry. We wish in every way to be helpful to you in your endeavour to solve some of the problems of the coal industry. Other than to re-emphasize to you the social problems that would be created, as a result of any further closure, would be catastrophic.

We therefore recommend:

(1) That the present structure of our coal industry be maintained. That all mines presently working would continue operating, which would require in our opinion, at least a market of seven million tons.

(2) That the coal mines should be assisted on the basis of seven million tons up to at least 1970, at which time we feel our problems should be solved market wise.

If this should not be the case, we recommend another review be made of the industry at that time.

(3) In the interest of efficiency we suggest that an Advisory Board be set up to consider the efficiency of management, production problems and marketing in order to ascertain that public funds are administered to the benefit of (a) the men employed in the industry (b) the citizens of Canada.

(4) We request that a tarriff be levied on imported oil and that a subvention be arranged whereby it would enable coal to be sold on competitive basis with imported oil used for commercial and thermo power use in the Atlantic Provinces and as far west as Montreal.

(5) Mr. H.C.M. Gordon, General Manager of Dosco Coal Operation, stated at a Provincial Conference in 1959 that the life of Florence Colliery would be at least fifteen years. We therefore recommend that in the interim period that provisions be made for the opening of a new Colliery which would be ready when the life of Florence has expired. It has been stated on many occasions by coal company officials that the reserves available on the Northside were being held by Old Sydney Collieries in the event that Florence Colliery would be closed. We recommend that strip operations should not be allowed as this would prevent a natural approach to available reserve seams.

In closing, we hope that as the result of your efforts you will see fit to recommend to the Government of Canada that the coal mines of Nova Scotia be provided with sufficient aid to allow them to operate full time and there should not be any closures at least until proper planning were effected by the Government of Canada to either open new mines or other industries which would enable our people to obtain employment and our communities be allowed to survive.

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